

White Paper

Report ID: 113333

Application Number: PF-50421-14

Project Director: Zinnia Willits

Institution: Gibbs Art Gallery

Reporting Period: 10/1/2014-6/30/2016

Report Due: 9/30/2016

Date Submitted: 11/14/2016

**NEH Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections Implementation Grant
White Paper**

Type of Report: White Paper

Grant Number: PF-50421-14

Title of Project: Framing the Future: Collections, Care, and Storage Renovation at the Gibbes Museum of Art

Name of Project Director: Zinnia Willits, Director of Collections and Operations

Name of Grantee Institution: Gibbes Museum of Art, Charleston, South Carolina

Date of Report: November 11, 2016

Introduction

In 2014 the Gibbes Museum of Art was awarded a Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections Implementation Grant of \$250,000 to be used toward the overall costs to relocate the fine art collection, purchase and install custom-designed, space and energy efficient art storage equipment, and return and reinstall the collection in a new storage and study center, as part of a major building renovation entitled *Framing the Future: A Campaign for Excellence at the Gibbes Museum of Art*. The Gibbes is dedicated to generating scholarship, exhibitions and programs that promote a broad understanding of the southeast and its role in American and world history, and contemplate its future. The building renovation is now complete and the Museum reopened to the public on May 28, 2016. The renovation restored the beauty of the original 1905 Beaux Arts building and introduced state-of-the-art systems for security, environmental controls, visitor amenities, and collections care that ensure the Museum's relevance and vibrancy for future generations. The reassignment of spaces within the Museum, implementation of flexible mechanical systems and installation of superior storage equipment have improved the quality of the preservation environment and already shown energy cost savings. Central to the renovation was a 3,900 square foot addition, which now houses the art collection in one high-performance storage area that takes advantage of intrinsic energy efficiencies. With a 50% increase in storage capacity and multiple layers of protection, the new Collections Storage Center makes the collection accessible to curators for better exhibition planning and allows more opportunity for hands-on research with objects not on display. The renovation responds to a burgeoning interest in art of the American South by providing scholars, educators, and other experts the opportunity to build knowledge and pursue inquiry through study of some of the nation's most important objects. For tourists, the Gibbes offers a gateway to the area's cultural heritage. Thanks to new efficiencies, spaces, and technology, the Museum has already increased its offerings to area students, with particular emphasis on Title I schools, where Gibbes programs often provide the only opportunity to gain exposure to the arts. The Collections Storage Center adds a new level of richness to the visitor experience through visible art storage that provides a thought-provoking window behind-the-scenes into collection preservation.

Project Activities

Major project activities that occurred during the grant period (Fall 2014-Spring 2016) included:

Packing/transporting/storing the collection prior to renovation

Between April and October 2014, three crews of professional fine art packers, in collaboration with Gibbes collection staff, successfully packed and relocated 8,000+ pieces of art to temporary, museum-quality, secure storage. Transport Consultants International (TCI) coordinated the packing teams which included, Ms. Wendy McGaw, owner of Artpack in Farmington Hills, Michigan, as the onsite crew supervisor during each phase of packing. Ms. McGaw created a comprehensive database for the project to track the location of all packed artwork; the searchable database was used many times to locate specific works of art in storage. Packers were on-site at the Gibbes for up to three weeks at a time during each packing phase of the project (works on paper, paintings and sculpture, artwork on display). US Art Company constructed 75 crates for the project and a crating specialist joined the crew for the

final phase of packing. During the packing process, crates and bins that contained works slated for reinstallation in the galleries were tagged and consolidated to ensure efficient unpacking upon return.

The Special Transport Division of Atlas Van Lines handled all transits of artwork to off-site storage locations. As noted in the grant narrative, the Gibbes partnered with the South Carolina State Museum, The Charleston Museum and the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, Georgia to store the art collection during renovation. Five tractor-trailers containing over 1,000 paintings and sculptures were sent to the High Museum's offsite storage facility. One tractor-trailer containing the Museum's works on paper collection (over 5,000 items) was sent to the South Carolina State Museum in Columbia, South Carolina, and over 800 miniature portraits were moved to secure storage at The Charleston Museum. The Gibbes negotiated storage rates with The High Museum and the South Carolina State Museum at costs much lower than commercial fine art storage. The Charleston Museum generously housed the miniature portrait collection free of charge.

Purchase and Installation of quality art storage equipment

Space and energy efficient art storage equipment detailed in the grant application was purchased in summer 2015. Patterson Pope, the company through which all equipment was purchased, coordinated installation with NBM, the construction crew completing the Gibbes Museum of Art renovation and expansion. Delivery of all storage equipment occurred in January 2016 by which point the third floor of the Museum was complete with HVAC running, security systems in place and gallery spaces finished. The first and second floors of the Museum were still under active construction. Installation of art racks, bins, shelving and flat files took approximately three weeks bringing the art storage area to substantial completion by January 20, 2016 in anticipation of return of artwork from all storage locations the week of January 26-29, 2016. Archival supplies were purchased in preparation for the return and unpacking of artwork including Volara for lining shelves and bins, archival board for interleaving paintings, glassine and archival tissue to place between works on paper, new "s"-type hooks to hang paintings on art racks and varieties of gloves for art handling.

Returning/Unpacking the collection

Ms. Zinnia Willits, Grant Project Director for the Gibbes Museum of Art, arranged for the return of all artwork from the South Carolina State Museum and the High Museum Storage Facility at the end of January 2016. Art transport was once again coordinated through Transport Consultants International who contracted the Special Transport Division of Atlas Van Lines to return art from off-site storage locations to Charleston. Trucks were staggered arriving two per day (one in the morning and one in the afternoon); five tractor-trailers were used to return the entire art collection, with the exception of the miniature portraits which remained at The Charleston Museum until March 2016, closer to the time of actual gallery installation. Ms. Willits oversaw the loading of all trucks in Atlanta and Columbia and Gibbes Preparator and Operations Manager, Mr. Greg Jenkins, supervised delivery on the Charleston end. For the first time in the Museum's 100-year history, tractor-trailers were able to back down the driveway to a proper loading dock with dock leveler, an exciting new feature of the construction project. All pallets containing bin boxes with packed art were dollied off trucks into an enclosed loading area and

taken directly to third floor galleries, which were used to stage packed artwork until it was unwrapped and placed in the new Collections Storage Center.

Ms. Willits worked through TCI to coordinate a crew to assist with unpacking. Three art packers (two of whom worked on all packing phases of the project in 2014) and Ms. MacGaw (the packing supervisor) returned to the Museum in February 2016. They spent three weeks on-site (working 8am-6pm, six days per week) unpacking all artwork and placing paintings, sculpture and solander boxes of works on paper into/onto new storage equipment. Ms. Willits and Mr. Jenkins worked with the crew for the duration and Ms. Willits directed the team on the placement of all artwork into storage situations. The advice of local conservators, Ms. Catherine Rogers (paintings), Ms. Nancy Newton (frames) and Mr. Marion Hunter (works on paper) on the initial locations of works in storage and passive preservation methods employed (new storage cabinets, metal, powder-coated bins for paintings, space-efficient lateral art racks, etc.) and their potential for long-term sustainability was helpful during the return process. Once again, Ms. MacGaw kept a database of all art movement and final storage locations. This temporary, searchable database has been invaluable to Gibbes collections staff as they continue the ongoing project of data transfer from the temporary database into the Museum's collection management system, Past Perfect.

Ms. Willits explored many options for recycling and reusing the 70+ crates built for the storage phase of the project. Ultimately, they were given to construction company crews and other sub-contractors on-site who utilized the wood for various personal projects. All archival packing material was saved (bin boxes, blue board, Tyvek, some crates) and formed the basis of the Museum's current cache of archival storage supplies.

Finally, in April/May 2016 Ms. Willits, Mr. Jenkins and Gibbes curators worked with contract art handling and preparation crews, conservators, designers and a lighting team to reinstall the permanent collection into seven renovated gallery spaces for the May 28, 2016 opening. The conservators were particularly helpful in terms of consult on final movements of objects into collection storage and gallery spaces.

Project Accomplishments

The accomplishments of this project are in line with the goals and objectives laid out in the grant application. **The major goal of the Framing the Future grant project was to protect an important humanities collection during the Museum renovation and expansion.** The goal was achieved with the assistance of NEH grant funds in various ways. Project staff was able to hire professional art handlers and the packing supervisor, all of whom had prior experience with large-scale collection moves and a knowledge base and skills to assist Gibbes staff with planning and implementing its own collection move and return. Likewise, staff was able to purchase quality packing materials, have a sufficient number of crates constructed to ensure the art collection was secure during transit and the storage period and arrange for high-quality fine art shipping to move the collection to and from various off-site storage locations.

NEH funds allowed the Gibbes to pay the storage fees necessary to rent adequate space in museum-quality, secure, climate-controlled storage during the two-year construction period, and fully funded the purchase of high-quality, environmentally conscious and space efficient, state-of-the art storage equipment and pay professionals to install it properly in the new Collections Storage Center. The space plan and new equipment provides approximately 50% more space for the collection with room for future growth on racks, in bins, in flat files and on shelves. Additional archival supplies to properly line shelves and further protect collections once they were unpacked and placed in storage were also purchased with grant money.

A second goal of the grant project was **the responsible implementation of an environmentally conscious, long-term, sustainable preservation strategy once the Museum transformation was complete.** To achieve this goal, Ms. Zinnia Willits, Grant Project Director, oversaw all details of planning for the storage area including HVAC considerations, fire suppression system and placement of sprinklers, and installation of duct work and security systems. She worked closely with the contractor, architect and engineers to establish preservation guidelines and goals for the storage area and gallery environments. As a result, the HVAC system in the Collection Storage Center is separate from gallery spaces and runs consistently at 70 +/-2 and 55%RH +/-5; likewise, storage equipment and materials used to protect paintings, works on paper and sculpture from light and dust were utilized and are examples of passive sustainable preservation. Ms. Willits worked with curatorial staff and case makers at Glasbau Hahn on the design of specialized exhibition furniture for the miniature portrait collection. Custom-made cases ensure that the fragile portraits (created with watercolor on ivory) on display are housed in a controlled micro-environment suitable for protecting this type of media. These interior micro-climates allow staff more flexibility when considering seasonal fluctuations of temperature and humidity and associated climate control throughout the galleries.

As the staff learns more about its new building, environments and seasonal fluctuations of temperature and humidity throughout the first year of operating they will continue to work toward a draft of a museum-wide Sustainability Policy and investigate the implementation of environmental data management software such as eClimate Notebook

Project Challenges

Ultimately, all activities specified as part of the project occurred during the grant period. However, due to unanticipated construction delays and timing with purchases, the original work plan was occasionally off by a month or two. For example, storage equipment was ordered at a later date than what was estimated in the Grant Work Plan. Likewise, at the writing of the Interim Grant Report (October 2016), the storage up-fit was set to occur in December 2015 when all construction on the third floor (where storage is located) was supposed to be completed with HVAC systems running, an operational loading dock, freight elevator and sprinkler and security systems. As stated in this final report, the storage up-fit did not occur until January 2016 due to further construction delays. Also, a major component of the storage equipment, the lateral art rack, had to be redesigned due to the final configuration of duct work in that portion of the storage area. As a result, ten of the art racks are 10ft high and ten are 9ft high.

Delays in building construction also impacted the timeline to return artwork to the building. The original Grant Work Plan estimated return dates in November/December 2015. All artwork actually returned the last week of January 2016. Due to these delays, budget contingencies for continued off-site storage had to be utilized.

While this project has not been formally evaluated as of yet, its successes and challenges were part of each phase and evident in the final results and the fact that 8,000 works of art were safely packed, stored, returned and reinstalled into high-quality fine art storage equipment. Not one collection item was lost or damaged during the process. All project challenges were related to museum construction and where the grant project fit into the overall schedule. This was not something that could have been planned for or controlled, only mitigated. All other aspects were executed smoothly. Contract art handlers were professional and efficient; art crating and transport operated as planned; storage locations (South Carolina State Museum, High Museum of Art and The Charleston Museum) were accommodating and provided the space and security necessary to store the Gibbes art collection; planning and transactions with Patterson Pope, the art storage equipment vendor, were straightforward; the products they provided were high quality, and the installation process was professional and efficient. The unknowns and challenges related to construction delays and occasional difficulty working with the general contractor and architect (in terms of timelines, museum protocols, etc.) impacted the grant project throughout in the form of schedule adjustments. This is something that should be anticipated and planned for with regard to all construction projects. It would have been helpful for Gibbes staff to have discussed the realities of a large-scale collection return to an active construction zone with other colleagues who had been through the process and could truthfully articulate the challenges that museum staff may face.

Audiences

This project created many opportunities to educate new audiences about the business of museums and ask visitors to consider why a museum exists and who works “behind-the-scenes.” From the beginning, Gibbes collections and curatorial staffs endeavored to turn the museum inside out with a visible Collections Storage Center. The *Framing the Future* project laid the groundwork for our current success. For example, during the second phase of collection packing (in which the crew wrapped over 800 paintings for transit to off-site storage, it was necessary to close a gallery (the Museum was still open at this point,) to ensure the crew had enough space to pack items safely and efficiently. Although the gallery was closed, visitors were able to watch (from behind stanchions) collections staff and art handlers at work. Allowing the public to witness these activities opened up new discussions about how artwork is stored, packed and transported, concepts that many visitors do not consider.

While the Museum was closed for construction, Ms. Willits, gave lectures locally and across the state to diverse groups (The American College of the Building Arts, Charleston Commercial Women in Real Estate, Friends of the Georgetown County Library, the South Carolina Federation of Museums, among others,) about the move project engaging new audiences and educating about how museum professionals executed the movement and storage of 8,000 fine art objects in preparation for a major museum renovation.

Once the Museum reopened, the Collections Storage Center immediately became a major attraction that appeals to visitors and new audiences including teachers, art camps, young children, docents and museum educators, and corporate groups to name a few. We have enhanced our ability to educate the public about museum careers and the concepts of how art is stored, protected and preserved when not on view. The new storage equipment allows more visibility of our collection thereby making it accessible for study by scholars and school children alike. Museum docents and teachers have incorporated discussion of "visible storage" into their tours. They often visit art storage to meet collection staff, observe how professionals handle, catalog and track artwork of all mediums or simply gaze through the windows and engage a group in discussion of where 95% of the permanent collection resides when not on exhibit. The following is a sampling of groups that have taken advantage of the Collections Storage Center's new spaces and accessible features since the Museum re-opened in May 2016:

- Ms. Willits offers a storage tour to the general public (free with admission) the first Wednesday of each month at 6pm. The first tour had over 40 participants and included the entire Art History Club from the College of Charleston.
- All sessions of the 2016 Gibbes summer art camp (ages 5-12) were treated to a guided tour of art storage with collections staff.
- Charleston County high school art teachers chose to spend their Professional Development Day at the Museum in August, 2016. Their agenda included a tour of art storage with Ms. Willits which opened up conversation about the possibilities of high school art classes utilizing the space and collection to enhance curriculums and learn from Gibbes staff.
- Several classes from the College of Charleston have visited the Collections Storage Center for structured programs. Most recently a print making class viewed a selection (not on view) of the Museum's Japanese prints with Curator of Collections, Ms. Sara Arnold.
- Hollywood film producer, Joel Silver (who owns a plantation in South Carolina) has an interest in works by lowcountry artist, Alice Ravenel Huger Smith, from the Charleston Renaissance period (1920-1940.) Mr. Silver (and his entourage) recently visited the Collection Storage Center to view a selection of rarely-seen Alice Smith watercolors in person.
- Museum professionals and staff from other cultural organizations have been given personal tours of art storage including those from: Historic Charleston Foundation, The Charleston Museum, the South Carolina State Museum, the Southeastern Museums Conference and South Carolina Federation of Museums.

Continuation of Project

The building renovation has been the subject of numerous and widespread positive articles and publications. The visible Collections Storage Center is often referenced as a unique feature of the new Gibbes and something the Museum can be proud of. Ms. Willits has received many inquiries from colleagues seeking advice on similar collection move projects and sustainable art storage and open storage techniques. We anticipate the professional examples we have set will continue to generate interest as word continues to spread about what the Gibbes Museum achieved through this NEH grant project.

Ms. Willits and her collections staff plan to continue to build on the *Framing the Future* project in several ways. Ms. Willits will continue to present aspects of the collection move at professional conferences. She recently led the session, Museum Storage Planning, at the 2016 Southeastern Museums Conference and has been approached by the Building Museums Conference and the American Institute of Conservators Conference to present similar sessions about the packing, movement, storage and reinstallation of 8,000 works of art. Ms. Willits is also working on a small grant to fund interpretive signage outside the Collections Storage Center to explain what happens in art storage and who works there. The project work plan includes special “highlight” components of the display that would change every few months and focus on a different aspect of collection preservation and management. For the first “deep dive” staff plan to reveal “The Secret Life of a Painting.” In this feature, a painting from the collection will be installed on a wall just outside art storage and hung in a custom-designed shadow box with a black light mounted inside. To the naked eye this painting (a portrait of a woman) appears pristine. However, once the black light is illuminated (through a switch that visitors will be able to turn on and off,) extensive conservation work that repaired an unfortunate tear in the canvas is revealed. This feature will discuss art conservation and the ways it is used to preserve and prolong the lives of paintings, many of which often have complicated and sometimes difficult lives (little climate control, direct light, insect issues) prior to arriving in a museum collection. We hope The Secret Life of a Painting component will open new discussions about museums and the acquisitions process, conservators, conservation careers, and sustainable methods to preserve museum collections. Ms. Willits plans to submit a grant request to the South Carolina Humanities Council to fund the fabrication and installation of this exciting project.

Collaborative partnerships have been diverse and continue to present themselves as a result of this project. Over the course of the grant, museum staff has made new and meaningful connections with: art packers and shippers, colleagues at institutions the Gibbes partnered with to store its collections, art storage equipment vendors, security companies, conservators, HVAC professionals, architects, contractors and many more. These collaborations will continue in the form of programming and lectures at professional conferences that focus on how all contract professionals worked together with Gibbes project staff to “move the museum.” Cross-disciplinary collaboration will be a focus of all future presentations and publications and members of the *Framing the Future* project team (conservators, packers, shippers, architects, and storage planning consultants) will be invited to participate and contribute their unique perspectives and multiple viewpoints.

Long Term Impact

The implementation of this project has positioned the Gibbes Museum of Art to continue to effectively fulfill its mission to link the art of the past with the art of the future through innovative programs that preserve and promote the art of Charleston and the American South. The refurbished, redesigned, expanded Collections Storage Center has positively impacted the promise of long-term sustainability of the art collection ensuring it is both protected and accessible for study and enjoyment by future generations. Practical preservation tactics implemented throughout the project optimized space and were environmentally responsible. The outcomes of this project will have significant long-term impacts.

The successful, safe, cost-effective packing, storage and return of the art collection during the building renovation has ensured the longevity of the Gibbes' vision and commitment to the humanities to bring outstanding historic collections, the emerging art of our time, and unique educational opportunities to the broadest possible audiences. Likewise, the *Framing the Future* project was instrumental to the larger initiative to improve energy efficiency and quality of the preservation environment in the Gibbes' collection storage area. The incorporation of custom-designed storage equipment and a low energy, passive, individualized approach to protecting sensitive objects has augmented the energy savings achieved through building-wide mechanical improvements. New HVAC controls and associated upgrades now provide a stable environment for all components of the art collection and have allowed staff to investigate new operational protocols keyed to seasonal changes and building buffering capacity that incorporate recent research related to broader environmental ranges necessary for long-term preservation of museum collections. The Gibbes is committed to reducing consumption and moving forward as a responsible steward of both the collection and the environment. Staff is actively working toward the creation of a comprehensive Sustainability Policy. To this end, an in-house Sustainability Task Force (comprised of Collections and Operations staff and several members of the Board of Directors) was recently created to move the Museum through the process. The goal is for the Sustainability Policy to guide institutional efficiency in all areas of operation from collections management to integrated pest control to facility maintenance practices. The collaborative discussions about environmental protocols, reduction of energy consumption, and collection preservation that have taken place throughout the project will form a base for this policy.

Another long-term impact of this project is the spotlight it has cast on the Gibbes Museum of Art as a model to others facing similar renovation/collection move situations. The safe, efficient movement of the collection prior to construction, long-term storage and return and reinstallation of 8,000 pieces of art into new, energy and space efficient art storage (in the midst of construction) is already being used as a case study to guide and inform similar projects, particularly in the southeast. As one of the larger cultural institutions in South Carolina, the Gibbes is viewed as a leader and role model for smaller museums throughout the state. Dissemination of all aspects of the *Framing the Future* project may prove helpful for small institutions that recognize the need for proper care of collections and preservation planning but are unsure where and how to begin. Project staff has documented all phases of work (see images at end of narrative) and are beginning to assess (based in reality) the impact that efficient space allocation, upgrades to the storage environment, and implementation of museum-wide environmental controls will have on the longevity of the collection.

Grant Products

The Gibbes is well positioned to effectively share project results with the museum community at many levels. Project Director Zinnia Willits is actively involved in professional organizations at the state, regional, and national levels and regularly organizes and presents educational sessions at conferences. Ms. Willits has already presented one session on Museum Storage Planning for the regional museum association and anticipates speaking about other aspects of the *Framing the Future* project at future

conferences including the 2017 Southeastern Museums Conference for which Ms. Willits is the Program Committee Chair.

There has been great interest, both public and professional, about how the Gibbes accomplished the monumental task of storing 8,000 works of art off-site for two years and operating the Museum without a building during the renovation period. Ms. Willits presented several lectures locally to interested groups about the project and wrote a blog post (see www.gibbesmuseum.org) that detailed the packing, transit and storage process. Hardhat tours of the building were offered regularly to museum staffs (local and from around the state) during the construction period (2014-2016) that allowed colleagues and peers to see where the new Collections Storage Center would be located and how Gibbes staff had managed the move.

Details of various aspects of the project have already been featured in publications including the South Carolina Federation of Museum's publication, *Good Muse*, the Southeastern Museums Conference quarterly publication *Inside SEMC*, and most recently in the forthcoming journal, *Museums in Motion*. More recent blog posts on the Gibbes Museum website detailing the new Collections Storage Center, open storage concept, and types of storage furniture have been utilized by museum studies and museology classes nationally and internationally. Project highlights will continue to be shared on the blog and other social media outlets to engage the public's growing and continued interest in art of the American South, the unique role Charleston played in the art historical trends of the region and the necessity to meticulously preserve the Gibbes fine art collection. Museum staff is grateful for the support NEH provided through the Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections grant. The funding was essential to the protection of an important humanities collection during a major renovation and expansion and responsible implementation of an environmentally conscious, long-term, sustainable preservation strategy to guide us into the future.

Representative Samples of Completed Work

Images of collection packing



Artwork being crated in Main Gallery once Museum was closed.



Art packers preparing to secure flat files for transit



5,000 packed works on paper



Packing of painting collection in a closed gallery



Emptying out art storage

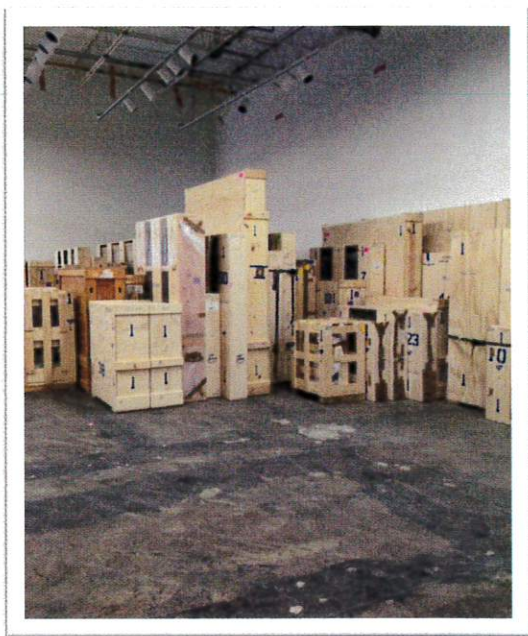


Packed paintings secured in bin boxes for transit



Oversize artwork being packed into custom crates

Images of off-site art storage



High Museum of Art Storage Facility



Crates in transit



South Carolina State Museum Storage

Images of Gibbes Collections Storage Center Up-fit



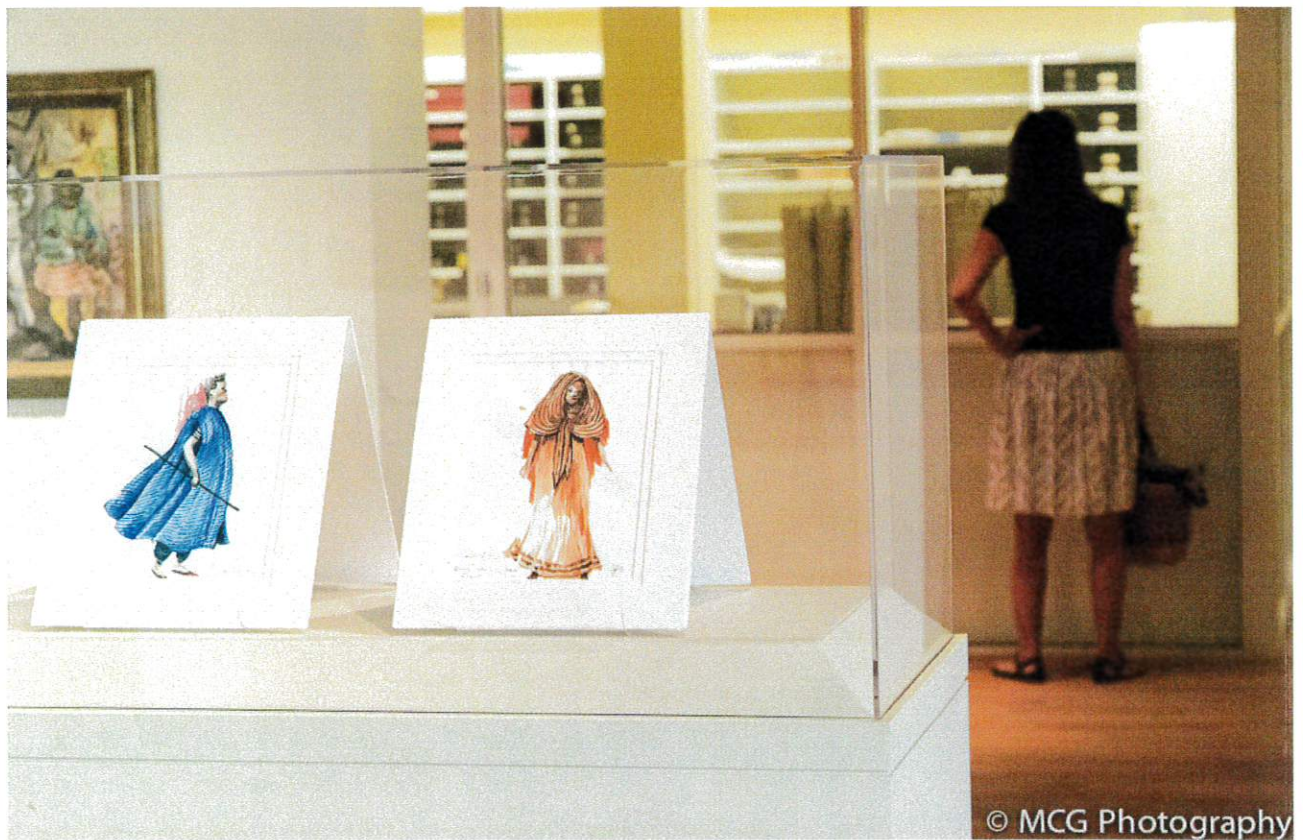
Art rack installation



Images of collection unpacking



Images of completed Collections Storage Center





Images of various groups benefiting from learning opportunities in the GMA Collections Storage Center



Charleston County high school art teachers learning about storage of prints



Gibbes summer campers on storage tour



Older group of summer campers learning about frame repair



Summer camp learning about storage of miniature portraits



A print making class from College of Charleston viewing the Japanese Print Collection